DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 084 055 RC 007 436

AUTHOR Dietrich, Katheryn Thomas
TITLE Determinants of Family Power Among Low-Income Southern Blacks.
INSTITUTION Texas A and M Univ., College Station. Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO TAES-H-2906
PUB DATE Mar 73
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Southwestern Sociological Association, Dallas, Texas, March 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Economic Factors; *Family Life; *Low Income Groups; *Negroes; Parent Role; *Power Structure; *Rural Areas; Rural Urban Differences; Social Structure; Southern States; Unemployment

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine conjugal decision-making and decision-implementation in nonmetropolitan and metropolitan samples of low-income blacks and to explore variables which may be related to the observed decision-making structures. The nonmetropolitan sample was drawn from 2 rural villages and a small town in East Texas. The metropolitan sample consisted of residents of an economically disadvantaged area of Houston, Texas. The total sample numbered 52 villagers, 207 town and 294 metropolitan black homemakers. All respondents were interviewed by black female adults who had been trained by the researchers in interviewing procedure. Major areas studied included role patterning, composite power configurations, and interaction patterns. The findings suggested that the matriarchal family structure is far from pervasive among low-income black families and that the husband seems to play a much larger role in family decision-making and decision-implementation than expected. (PS)

Do not quote without permission
of the author.

Permission granted
01-12-73

RECEIVED
JUN 4 1973
NMSU
E.R.I.C.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 084055

RC 007436

DETERMINANTS OF FAMILY POWER AMONG LOW-INCOME SOUTHERN BLACKS*

by

Katheryn Thomas Dietrich
Texas A&M University

*Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Southwestern Sociological Association, Dallas, March, 1973. This paper contributes to TAES project H-2906 and USDA (CSRS) regional project NC-90, "Factors Affecting Patterns of Living in Disadvantaged Families." Appreciation is extended John Womack, Bobbie George, and Ellen Kotrla for their assistance in the preparation of this manuscript.

Introduction

A review of the recent profusion of literature relating to family power yields relatively little empirical research that has dealt specifically with the low-income black family. The dearth of study seems surprising in light of the still raging controversy stimulated by "The Moynihan Report" (1965). Moynihan argues that much of black poverty can be attributed to a "deviant normative family role system" (Parker and Kleiner, 1969), a pathology characterized and perpetuated by "momism," or female-dominance, and the consequent demoralization of the black male.

In essence, the controversy concerns the extent to which such deviance is normative and self-perpetuating--a true subculture of poverty. Seldom, however, is the generalized matriarchal nature of low-income black families questioned. That such quiry is in order is attested to by the facts that many low-income black families are two-parent, that the great bulk of literature describing the power structure in these two-parent families is impressionistic, and that the findings of some recent empirical research suggests an egalitarian (Fortune, 1963) and even syncratic (King, 1969) power structure may predominate in these families.

Nevertheless, conclusions that greater female dominance and conjugal role segregation characterizes these families logically follow premises of the more popular theories of family power as well as the impressionistic literature. In regard to the latter, the low-income black would seem to share with other lower-class persons a simplified experience world, a sense

of powerlessness, deprivation in terms of needs and levels of aspiration, and insecurity (Cohen and Hodges, 1963). As a consequence, the lower classes are likely to be somewhat more authoritarian than most (a manisfestation of preference for "the least complex alternative," Lipset, 1960), to have a tendency "to take a person's power as a measure of his status," and to rely almost exclusively on solidary kin and neighboring relationships. These factors, in turn, seem to contribute to a rigid segregation of conjugal roles.

For the low-income black, these characteristics may be exacerbated due to the additional social and economic discrimination he suffers merely because he is black. Furthermore, the low-income black may still be heir to adaptations worked out by his ancestors during slavery, one such legacy being the black matriarchy (Rainwater, 1966). The extent to which this matriarchy is perpetuated in modern times however, is most usually explained by Blood and Wolfe's resource theory: that the balance of power in the family will be determined by the comparative resources provided by the family members (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). The low-income black family is distinctive in that the black adult male is a more frequent victim of un- or under-employment than his white counterparts, and the black female often has as much or more opportunity--especially given the present welfare system--to contribute to family income. Perhaps equally important, the black female is, by virtue of her often equal or greater participating in the external social system, as much or more competent than the black male to make the decisions that are important to their family's well-being (Blood and Wolfe, 1960, also emphasize the importance of this theory of relative competence). Moreover, the black male is purported to be less involved in activities that

are important to the family welfare. This factor of involvement per se has been found also to be positively correlated with some dimensions of family power (Wilkening and Bharadway, 1968).

While extant evidence demonstrates greater female-dominance in black than white families (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Centers and Raven, 1971; King, 1967), evidence that a matrifocal power structure may not be pervasive among low-income black families suggests a need for further investigation and possibly re-evaluation of the applicability of these explanations of family power for this sector of our society. Such investigation is the purpose of this study.

Procedures

Data Collection. The data utilized for this study were collected as part of a more comprehensive interregional and interethnic survey of patterns of living among disadvantaged families. The samples referred to in this particular analysis are nonmetropolitan and metropolitan black Southern homemakers who were interviewed in the summers of 1970 and 1971, respectively. The nonmetropolitan sample was drawn from two rural villages and a town of about 5,000 population in a predominantly rural county of East Texas. This county had a higher proportion of blacks and a substantially lower median income than the state of Texas generally, and it was located about 60 miles from the nearest metropolitan center.[1] The metropolitan sample was comprised of residents of an economically disadvantaged, almost all black ghetto of Houston, Texas.

---

[1]According to the 1970 Census, 75 percent of the county's population lived in places of 2,500 inhabitants or less, approximately 25 percent of the county's population was Negro, and the median annual income was $5221.

In accordance with the guidelines set forth in the larger study, only the main female homemakers of families in the study area who met the following criteria were included in the sample: (1) at least one child under 18 years of age resided in the home; (2) the female homemaker normally resided in the home; (3) the female homemaker mainly responsible for caring for the home was under 65 years of age and, unless she was the mother of one or more of the children living in the home, over 18. All households in the nonmetropolitan communities and a 50 percent random selection of households in the metropolitan study area were screened to determine if they met these criteria. From 94 to 100 percent of the homemakers who qualified were subsequently interviewed. The total sample numbered 52 villagers, 207 town and 294 metropolitan black homemakers. The numbers known to be living in intact (husband-present) families were 33, 143, and 128, respectively. All respondents were interviewed by black female adults who had been trained by the researchers in interviewing procedure. None of the interviewers resided in the study area, nor were they personally acquainted with the respondents.

Background of Respondents. According to various criteria, almost all of the respondents appeared to be of low socioeconomic status. The large majority of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan homemakers and their husbands had not completed more than an eighth grade education, and almost all were employed in semiskilled or unskilled jobs. According to a poverty index by which income in evaluated in relation to family size, age of family members, and a consumer price index for the study areas, two-thirds or more of the village, town, and metropolitan families

were found to be disadvantaged or of marginal poverty status. This index, however, is conservative (in the direction of underestimating poverty) and scores higher than marginal level were still generally low, suggesting few of the families could be considered advantaged.

For many of the respondents, living conditions were noticeably poor. However, the metropolitan families appeared generally better off in regard to housing facilities than their nonmetropolitan counterparts. On the other hand, unemployment and unskilled jobs were more likely to be found among the metropolitan main breadwinners. While about half of the nonmetropolitan and metropolitan wives worked outside the home, the homemaker was more often the main breadwinner in the metropolitan than nonmetropolitan family.

Power Measurement. It is acknowledged that this study taps only two aspects of family power, outcome of decision-making and decision implementation, or action-taking. Furthermore, the areas of decision-making and implementation have been restricted to those deemed more important to the functioning of the family. In addition, the measure was designed to accommodate a variety of ethnic groups and social classes, which necessitated reference to less specific decision types.

The decision-making question was prefaced: "In your family, who would say mainly decides..." The respondents were requested to answer "wife," "husband," or "husband and wife" in reference to the following six types of decisions: (1) which friends you see the most; (2) the best place for the family to live; (3) about the wife working outside the home; (4) about the number of children wanted; (5) how to handle the children; (6) how the money is used. Decision implementation was

elicited by the question, "Who would you say mainly: (1) Tries to make sure you don't have more children than you want? (2) Handles the children when both parents are at home? (3) Handles money matters (pays bills, spends for what the family needs, etc.)?" Response alternatives were the same as for decision-making.

Limitations. The author is cognizant of limitations in these procedures, among the most obvious of which is the tapping of only wives' perceptions. While the bulk of family power studies have employed this procedure and while there is some evidence of general similarity in husband and wife perceptions of conjugal decision-making (Centers and Raven, 1971; Heer, 1962), enough disagreement has been evidenced (Safilios-Rothschild, 1969; Granbois and Willett, 1970; Wilkening and Morrison, 1963; Scanzoni, 1965) to warrant caution in interpretation of data from only one spouse. Generally, a tendency has been observed for wives to minimize their own power (Olson, 1969; Turk and Bell, 1972) and to favor an egalitarian relationship (Heer, 1962).

Another limitation of the study is its inability to reveal the total configuration of phases, processes, and family member relationships which reflect family power--a failure of all family power studies to date (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970).

Aspects of family power other than decision-making outcome and the conjugal dyad are crucial to an understanding of black family power, yet they remain virtually unexplored.

In reference to the particular aspects of family power considered here, a recent validity study of different measures of power seems especially relevant. This work of Olson and Rabunsky (1972) demonstrates

inability of all major measures of family power to tap "objective reality." In addition, his findings suggest that retrospective recall of the mate(s) who exercises power (the technique employed in this study) really indicates..."who is perceived as the authority on that issue. And the person perceived as the authority is greatly influenced by cultural role expectations regarding what the relationship should be like rather than what the relationship is like, i.e., actual role performance." Hence, this report should shed some light on the controversy regarding the normative conjugal relationship in the black community--at least as it is perceived by the wife.

Analysis. Preliminary analysis of these data reveal variation in conjugal decision-making in the black families. The bulk did not fit the matrifocal stereotype. The procedures of analysis will be to examine role-patterning in reference to the various decision areas, to describe composite decision-making and decision-implementation configurations, and to investigate theoretically indicated factors which may account for the variation in conjugal decision-making within this racially and socio-economically homogeneous group.

Role Patterning

The differential distributions of the black homemaker's responses in reference to the various decision areas (shown in Table 1) illustrates the multidimensional nature of conjugal decision-making, i.e., "power in one area of decision does not necessarily imply power in some other area" (Centers and Raven, 1971; also observed by Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Heer, 1963; Levinger, 1964; Sharp and Mott, 1956). Perusal of the various combinations of responses revealed that, regardless of place of residence,

Table 1. Allocation of Power in Decision-Making and Decision Implementation.

Main Agent		Decision-Making						Decision Implementation		
		Friends	Where to Live	Wife Working	Number of Children	How to Handle Children	Use of Money	Limit Children	Handle Children	Use of Money
Wife	V	33.3%	6.1%	69.7%	33.3%	36.4%	24.2%	57.6%	27.3%	39.4%
	T	23.2	12.7	47.6	27.0	28.2	21.1	42.6	33.3	44.4
	M	27.6	26.0	41.7	41.0	29.1	29.1	63.4	45.2	56.7
Husband	V	6.1	42.4	12.1	3.0	24.2	30.3	6.1	33.3	27.3
	T	12.0	28.9	24.1	19.0	17.6	16.9	11.6	23.4	16.9
	M	12.6	22.8	29.1	6.6	7.1	11.0	0.8	16.7	15.0
H & W	V	60.6	51.5	18.2	63.6	39.4	45.5	36.4	39.4	33.3
	T	64.8	58.5	28.4	54.0	54.2	62.0	45.6	43.3	38.7
	M	59.8	51.2	29.1	52.5	63.8	59.8	35.8	38.1	28.3
X^2		NS[a]	X^2=13.99 df=4 P<.01	NS[a]	X^2=15.16 df=4 P<.01	X^2=11.82 df=4 P<.02	NS[a]	X^2=19.00 df=4 P<.001	NS[a]	NS[a]
Husband's Mean Power[b]	V	1.73	2.36	1.42	1.70	1.88	2.03	1.48	2.06	1.88
	T	1.89	2.16	1.77	1.92	1.89	1.95	1.69	1.90	1.73
	M	1.85	1.97	1.87	1.66	1.78	1.82	1.37	1.71	1.58

[a] $P \leq .05$

[b] Husbands mean power was derived by weighting the responses as follows: Wife = 1; Husband and Wife = 2; Husband = 3.

less than 13 percent answered identically in reference to all of the decision-making areas, and only one-fourth of less answered more than four of the six questions the same. In general, consistency in response was indicative of a highly syncratic relationship (i.e., husband-wife sharing).

It is significant that husband-wife sharing of decision-making power was the modal and generally the majority response in reference to all decision areas except about the wife working outside of the home (Table 1). The black homemakers were more likely to perceive this latter area of decision as their own autonomous domain. Yet among the town and metropolitan respondents, "wife" was still not the majority response to this item.

Looking at the husband's mean relative power scores (Table 1), one can observe a continuum of power ranging from a high shown in all samples in reference to decisions about where to live. Husband-power was perceived as lowest by the village and town homemakers in reference to decisions about the wife working; by the metropolitan homemakers in reference to deciding on the number of children.

In regard to the several corresponding areas of decision-implementation, there appears a generally greater proclivity for wife-dominance in lieu of husband-wife sharing. Nevertheless, there was considerable variation in the black homemakers responses, both within and between the areas of action-taking. In all of the samples, husbands' relative involvement in decision implementation was perceived as greatest in reference to handling the children; least in reference to limiting the number of children.

In regard to variation in role-patterning by place of residence, statistically significant differences are observed but no definitive pattern of differences emerges.

Composite Power Configurations

Decision-making. Estimates of the overall distribution of decision-making power in these black families are based upon Wolfe's (1959) conceptualization of conjugal power and the classification and scaling procedures employed by Wolfe and by Centers and Raven (1971). This method takes into consideration two dimensions of decision-making power: the autonomous decision-making ranges of the husband and wife and a range in which both spouses share decisions.

The procedure consists of deriving two indices, an index of relative husband-wife authority (RA) and an index of degree of shared authority (DS). These indices in turn provide the base for a four-fold classification of conjugal power distribution: "(1) Wife Dominant type, wherein the wife's range of authority is considerably larger than her husband's. (2) The Syncratic Type, consisting of couples between which there is nearly a balance of relative authority and the shared range is equal to or greater than the combined ranges of husband and wife. (3) The Autonomic Type, wherein there is also an approximate balance of relative authority, but the husband's and wife's ranges together are greater than the shared range. (4) The Husband Dominant Type,...in which the husband's range is considerably greater than that of his wife" (Centers and Raven, 1971).

While there are problems in interpreting overall decision-making scores (Safilios-Rothschild, 1969), such scores seem almost essential in ordering an analysis of a large number of independent variables as this one. Furthermore, the procedure employed here seems especially suitable to investigation of the purported conjugal role segregation in lower class families.

In computing the indices and composite classification, the item referring to number of children has been excluded, because of the lower response rate to this question and because of its dubious applicability to many of the families. To derive the RA score, responses to the other five decision-making items were weighted as follows: "Husband" = 3; "Husband and Wife" = 2; "Wife" = 1. The responses were then summed, producing a possible range of index scores from 5 through 15. The DS score was derived by counting the number of "Husband and Wife" responses for the five items. Authority type was determined as follows: (1) Wife Dominant--where RA = 5-8; (2) Syncratic--where RA = 9-11 and DS = 3-5; (3) Autonomic--where RA = 9-11 and DS = 0-2; (4) Husband Dominant--where RA = 12-15. The equalitarian range was conservatively defined, because of the tendency to answer in this manner.

As shown in Table 2, the modal authority type was syncratic. Nevertheless, this accounted for only about a third of the families, suggesting the majority were characterized by conjugal role segregation as the literature on low-income families would lead us to expect. In contrast to the black, low-income stereotype, however, only a minority (from a fourth to a third) of these families were found to be wife-dominant. As expected, only a few families were indicated to be husband-dominant.

Interaction Patterns--Decision-Making and Decision-Implementation. The differential response to questions regarding decision implementation as compared with decision-making indicates a need to examine at least briefly the interaction of these two dimensions of conjugal power. More thorough treatment of this interaction has been presented by Nancy Kutner (1971). For the purposes of this abbreviated analysis, the work of Herbst (1952) serves as a model. Considering the various possibilities of interaction

Table 2. Composite Decision-Making Scores, by Place of Residence

	Nonmetropolitan		Metropolitan
	Village (N=33)	Town (N=143)	(N=128)
Mean RA Score	9.58	9.69	9.42
Mean DS Score[a]	2.15	2.66	2.63
Authority Types:[b]			
Wife Dominant	30.3%	24.5%	33.6%
Autonomic	24.3	21.0	14.1
Syncratic	33.3	37.7	39.0
Husband Dominant	12.1	16.8	13.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a]Chi Square values based on place of residence differences in distributions of DS scores were not significant.

[b]Chi Square values were not significant.

between action-taking (decision-implementation) and decision-making, Herbst arrives at seven classifications of family power, as shown in Table 3. In addition to syncratic and autonomic types of family structure, Herbst distinguishes another: the autocratic, "in which decisions on group activities are made by one section of the group only."

The data reveal considerable variation in conjugal interaction patterns. "Syncratic Cooperation" (i.e., the husband and wife do and decide about the activity together) was the predominant pattern, yet it characterized only about a fourth to a third of the black families. Of the remaining patterns, two were identified somewhat more frequently: "wife autonomy" (i.e., "the wife does and decides about the activity by herself") and "syncratic division of functions" with wife as the main action-taker (i.e., both H and W decide but the wife implements the decision). Autocratic conjugal relationships, at least in reference to these two areas of decision-making, appeared to characterize only a small proportion of the black families.

Related Variables

Despite their racial and socioeconomic homogeneity, the families of the black homemakers in these samples differed in ways related to both resource theory and the theory of relative competence--e.g., the extent to which their low incomes caused economic hardship, the comparative resource contributions of the husbands and wives, the wives' subjective assessments of economic and other aspects of their familial situation. This portion of the analysis will explore the association of many of these factors with conjugal decision-making structures. The extent of factors considered goes beyond that frequently employed in tests of resource theory, because findings like those of Scanzoni (1971) suggest factors such as subjective perceptions

Table 3. Conjugal Interaction Patterns in Reference to Handling Children and Use of Money.

Pattern	Designation	Handling Children			Use of Money		
		V (N=33)	T (N=143)	M (N=128)	V (N=33)	T (N=143)	M (N=128)
Ha Hd	Husband Autonomy	21%	8%	2%	24%	5%	5%
Wa Wd	Wife Autonomy	15	17	22	21	15	23
Ba Hd	Husband Leadership	3	7	3	0	4	2
Ba Wd	Wife Leadership	12	9	3	3	4	3
Wa Hd	Husband Autocracy	0	2	2	6	8	4
Ha Wd	Wife Autocracy	9	2	4	0	2	3
Ba Bd	Syncratic Cooperation	24	28	32	30	30	23
Ha Bd	Syncratic Division of Functions	3	12	10	3	10	7
Wa Bd		12	14	21	12	22	30
TOTAL		100	100	100	100	100	100

may be equally or more important influencers of conjugal power structures than the actual external resources, per se. In addition, consideration of the somewhat unique aspects of the internal structure of many low-income black families (e.g., extranuclear) necessitates broadening the usual scope of conjugal power analysis.

Specifically to be examined are the associations of these independent variables with two of the measures of decision-making power: the RA scores and Authority Type. Analysis of Variance and Chi Square, respectively, were the statistical treatments employed. The .05 level of probability was designated the criteria of statistical significance. Nonmetropolitan and metropolitan samples were kept separate throughout the analysis. The small number of village respondents were excluded from the nonmetropolitan sample.

Income. It was expected that the greater the ability of a family's income to meet the family's needs--i.e., taking into account such factors as family size and age of family members--the higher the husband's relative authority (RA) and the more likely the family would evidence a Syncratic Authority Type. However, no statistically significant differences were found between this variable, as measured by the poverty index previously defined,[2] and either RA or Authority Type.

Subjective Assessment of Income. In reference to the wives' subjective assessments of their family's income, three variables were analyzed: the wife's perception of how adequate she thought the family income was, how dependable she thought it was, and where on a four-rung ladder she would rank her family's financial status in relation to that of other families in the

---

[2]Additional description of measures, scales, and categorizations employed in the analysis are presented in the Appendix. More detailed information regarding the data analysis is not presented because of space requirements but will be furnished upon request.

local black community. In the nonmetropolitan sample, wife's perception of income adequacy was found to be positively associated with husband's relative authority (RA). $F = 6.90$; df=2 and 140; $P<.01$. While in the metropolitan sample the F value was not statistically significant, the same trend in response was observed and the difference between the lower mean RA score of respondents who perceived their family income as totally inadequate (i.e., not able to meet necessities) and the mean RA for the adjacent higher adequacy category (i.e., able to meet necessities only) exceeded the Least Significant Difference at the .05 level of significance. No statistically significant differences were observed between this independent variable and Authority Type or between the other two subjective variables and either indicator of conjugal decision-making power.

Husband's Income Contribution. Whether or not the husband was employed at all during the year, if he was employed only part of the year versus all of the year, or if his employment was generally part-time versus full-time was not found to influence RA or Authority Type. However, the large majority of husbands were employed full-time throughout the year, indicating caution in generalizing this seeming lack of association to other low-income black samples.

In looking at the earned income contributions of the husbands who were employed, income was categorized: (1) $3,000 or less; (2) $3,000-$4,999; (3) $5,000-$6,999; and (4) $7,000 or more. Nonmetropolitan husbands who earned $3,000 or less during the year evidenced a substantially lower mean RA score than nonmetropolitan husbands who earned higher incomes (the mean RA difference between the last two income categories, less than $3,000 and $3,000-4,499, exceeded the LSD at the .01 level of significance.) The families

of these lower-earning husbands were substantially more likely to be Wife Dominant; however, the Chi Square value for income versus Authority Type was not statistically significant. In the metropolitan sample, amount of husband's earned income was not found to be associated with either decision-making measure.

Wife's Income Contribution. Both wife's employment outside of the home and the amount of her income contribution were found to be associated with conjugal power structure. Wife's employment was positively associated with her relative decision-making power--inversely associated with RA. (Nonmetropolitan: $F = 5.30$; df=2 and 140; $P < .01$. Metro: $F = 7.03$; df= 2 and 125; $P < .01$.) In the nonmetropolitan sample, it seemed only to matter if the wife was employed at all during the year; for the metropolitan wife, whether she was employed only part of the year or all of the year also appeared significant. However, whether a wife worked part-time or full-time in terms of number of hours per week was not found to affect her decision-making power in either sample.

In the metropolitan sample, Authority Type was significantly related to wife's employment. Wives who worked all year were the most likely ones to dominate family decision-making. Wives who did not work at all during the year were the least likely to live in a Wife-Dominant family and the most likely to share decision-making (Syncratic).

The majority of employed wives earned less than $3,000 per year, and the total amount of their income (less than $3,000 versus $3,000 or more) was not found to be associated with the decision measures. A more significant variable than the actual income figure might be the proportion of overall family income that the wife's income comprised. To determine the salience of

this factor, this variable was categorized: (1) None; (2) 1/2 or less; (3) more than 1/2. Again, however, the significant factor seemed to be only whether or not the wife was an income contributor.

H-W Comparative Income Contribution. While in the nonmetropolitan sample, the mean RA score was somewhat lower for families whose wives earned more than their husbands during the year, the difference was not great enough to be statistically significant. In the metropolitan sample, whether or not the wife earned more than the husband was not found to be related to conjugal power.

Occupation. Although the large majority of occupations of the husbands and wives were blue-collar, it was thought that finer occupational distinction within the blue-collar group might affect conjugal power. Comparing unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled blue-collar, and white-collar laborers, neither husband's nor wife's occupation nor their comparative occupational status was found to be associated with conjugal decision-making power.

Education. Although the husbands and wives were generally poorly educated, there was much variation at the lower educational ranks. Using the categorizations, (1) 6th grade or less, (2) 7th to 8th grade, (3) 9th to 11th grade, (4) 12th grade, (5) College, decision-making power was not found to vary significantly with husband's or wife's education or with their comparative educational achievement. Because high school is an especially critical level of achievement, however, comparative analysis was also done with the families classified as follows: (1) H&W less than HS; (2) W only completed HS; (3) H only completed HS; (4) both completed HS. Statistically significant differences in mean RA scores were observed in the metropolitan sample

($F = 2.89$; df=3 and 124; $P < .05$). The mean RA was highest where the husband had completed high school but the wife had not; it was lowest where both spouses had completed high school.

Residence Background. Residence background may significantly affect a spouse's resource contribution (e.g., his income-producing ability) and his decision-making competence. Other things being equal, a nonmigrant is expected to have advantages over a migrant, and an urban migrant--at least in the urban setting--advantages over the rural migrant. In the metropolitan sample, the mean RA score was highest for the nonmigrants and lowest for the rural migrants; however, the association was not statistically significant. Authority Type was also related to this independent variable ($X^2 = 12.58$; df=6; $P < .05$), but the significant factor seemed to be migrant versus nonmigrant status and not the migrant's rural or urban background. The metropolitan nonmigrants were substantially more likely than migrants to live in an Autonomic or Husband Dominant family and less likely to live in a Wife Dominant or Syncratic household. The association did not hold for the nonmetropolitan husbands, but the number of migrants in these groups was low.

Comparing just the migrant status of H and W, the few (11) town families in which the wife was a nonmigrant and the husband a migrant evidenced a substantially lower mean RA score than the other families (difference between this mean and that of adjacent categories exceeded the LSD at the .05 level of significance). No significant differences were observed regarding H-W comparative migrant status in the metropolitan sample.

Neither comparative rural-urban background of H and W nor whether or not wives were reared on a farm appeared to be associated with conjugal decision-making.

Age. Age may be a salient variable relating to conjugal power not only because of its ideological relationship (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) but also because of its association with wife dependence, decision-making competence, etc. Age was categorized: (1) 20 and under; (2) 21-29; (3) 30-39; (4) 40-49; (5) 50 or more.[3] While the statistical tests of association were negative, it is perhaps significant that in both the nonmetropolitan and metropolitan samples, the highest and lowest mean RA scores were for the categories 20 or under and 50 or over, respectively. In the metropolitan sample, the families of these younger wives were substantially more likely than the others to be Syncratic, those of the older wives, Wife Dominant.

To determine if the spouses' ages in relation to each other might have more of an impact on their relative decision-making power, the families were classified as follows: (1) W 4 or more years older; (2) W&H ages within 0-4 years of each other; (3) H 5-9 years older; (4) H 10 or more years older. This variable was not found to be associated with relative H-W decision-making power.

Stage of Family Life Cycle. This variable may be a salient determinant of conjugal power because of its relationship to wife dependency and perhaps parent-child competition. The black families were classified according to age of oldest child, based upon the stage of family life cycle schema delineated by Hill (1964): (1) Oldest child under two years of age; (2) Preschool (3-6); (3) School age (6-12); (4) Adolescent (13-19); (5) Young adult (20 or more until leaves home); (6) From departure of first to last

---

[3]The N's were not large enough for finer age discriminations. Few husbands were over 65 years of age, consequently their inclusion or exclusion from analysis would not affect the results significantly.

child; (7) Postparental family. The pattern of responses was similar to that observed for wife's age. Overall differences were not statistically significant, but a tendency appeared for new-parent families to exhibit the highest mean RA and postparental families, the lowest.

Because the low-income black family is frequently large and, consequently, with a large discrepancy between the age of the youngest and oldest child, age of the youngest child living at home was also considered as an independent variable. In the metropolitan sample, age of youngest child was found to be associated with RA ($F = 3.09$; df=4 and 125; $P < .05$). The mean RA was highest in those families where the homemaker's youngest child was an infant; lowest, where the youngest child was a preschooler. Families having no children under 18 also exhibited a lower mean RA score.

Other Aspects of Family Composition. The total number of children under 18 years of age in the family was analyzed as an independent variable; however, it did not appear to be associated with the measures of conjugal power. Another variable often characteristic of low-income black households, the presence of adults other than husband and wife, was also considered. The presence of other adult females in the home appeared to be associated with decision-making power (Nonmetro: $F = 5.70$; df=1 and 143; $P < .05$. Metro: $F = 3.87$; df=1 and 128; $P < .05$; $X^2 = 10.26$; df=3; $P < .05$). However, the direction of the association with RA was opposite in the nonmetropolitan and metropolitan samples. In the town, RA was negatively associated with the presence of another adult female; in the metropolitan sample, the association was positive. A relationship between other adult females and Authority Type was found only in the metropolitan sample. Families with other adult females present were less likely to be Wife Dominant and more likely to be

Autonomic than families with no other adult females. Presence of adult males other than the husband did not appear to be related to conjugal decision-making power.

Other Subjective Factors. Wife's satisfaction with her husband's ability to provide resources other than money or status was also analyzed. A scale tapping wife's satisfaction with her husband's understanding, attention, help around the home, and time spent talking (see Appendix) appeared to be positively associated with husband's relative decision-making power. Metropolitan families whose wives indicated high marital satisfaction evidenced a substantially higher mean RA score (difference between high MarSat and the adjacent category, moderate, exceeded the LSD at the .05 level of significance). In both the nonmetropolitan and metropolitan samples, families with wives who showed high marital satisfaction were more likely to be Syncratic and less likely Wife Dominant than the other families. Families of wives who showed low marital satisfaction were more likely to be Autonomic or Wife Dominant (Nonmetro: $X^2 = 12.21$; df=6; $P < .05$. Metro: $X^2 = 12.28$; df=6; $P < .06$).

In the nonmetropolitan sample, another subjective variable appeared to be related to Authority Type: the wife's perception of where she would rank her family on a 4-rung ladder in regard to their power in the local black community ($X^2 = 19.06$; df=9; $P < .05$). The highest ranked families were more likely to be Syncratic; the lowest, Wife Dominant.

The last two independent variables analyzed, wife's satisfaction with house size and wife's satisfaction with other aspects of her home, were not found to be associated with conjugal decision-making power.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to examine conjugal decision-making and decision-implementation in nonmetropolitan and metropolitan samples of low-income blacks and to explore variables which may be related to the observed decision-making structures. In regard to specific decision areas, husband-wife sharing of decisions was consistently the most common response. However, husband's relative decision-making power was found to vary by decision area, ranging from a high in reference to where to live. Wife-dominance appeared greater in reference to corresponding areas of decision implementation (action-taking) than decision-making. Nevertheless, the husband retained a significant role in decision-implementation; his role seemingly greatest in handling the children.

Indicators of composite decision-making structures suggest much variation exists in the low-income black samples. While conjugal role segregation in terms of decision-making did appear to characterize most of the families, only from a fourth to a third of the families were found to be Wife-Dominant. Variation in conjugal power structures was exceptionally apparent when both decision-making and decision-implementation (action-taking) were considered.

Examination of a myriad of hypothesized independent variables suggests that internal as well as external resource contributions of husband and wife, subjective assessments of and satisfaction with these resources, relative competence of husband and wife, and internal characteristics somewhat peculiar to low-income black families all may be salient determinants of conjugal decision-making structures among income-income blacks. Specifically, the following variables were found to be associated with husband's and wife's relative decision-making power:

Factors related to external resource contributions and/or decision-making competence: Husband's income; wife's employment, H-W comparative educational achievement (whether or not completed high school); migrant status; age of wife; age of youngest and oldest children.

Subjective assessment of external resources: Wife's perception of income adequacy; wife's perception of family's power in the local community.

Subjective assessment of internal resource contributions: Wife's satisfaction with husband's attention, help around the home, etc.

Other: Presence of other adult females in the home.

The nature of these associations are in the same general direction as has been observed for white, mixed, and higher class black samples--that is, if the variables have been investigated previously and found to be statistically significant. (See among others Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Centers and Raven, 1971; Hoffman, 1960; Evans and Smith, 1969; Scanzoni, 1971.) Further investigation is needed, however, to determine if some of these factors are more salient and some less salient for the low-income black. The results of this analysis suggest a number of variables found to be related to conjugal power in these other groups (e.g., occupational status) may not be significant for the low-income black family.[4]

The place of residence differences found in conjugal decision-making and decision-implementation emphasize the significance of residence as an independent variable. In addition, the residence differences in observed associations between decision-making power and the other independent variables demonstrates the need to maintain such residence distinctions in analysis and the inappropriateness of generalizing from the results of the

---

[4]Additional research is needed to test the validity of these findings because the lack of association may have been the result of the methods or samples utilized. Safilios-Rothschild (1970), Centers and Raven (1971), and Olson and Rabunsky (1972) demonstrate the variability of results with the methods employed.

more frequent metropolitan analyses to nonmetropolitan blacks.

In conclusion, the findings of this analysis suggest the matriarchal family structure is far from pervasive among low-income black families. The husband seems to play a much larger role in family decision-making and decision-implementation (action-taking) than the impressionistic literature would have us believe. Furthermore, the impressionistic literature portrays the low-income black family as the archetype for the external resource and relative competence explanations of conjugal power. Such theories seem to be simplistic and insufficient explanations of conjugal power even in this sector of our society. This conclusion corroborates that made from analyses of other racial and socioeconomic groups (Centers and Raven, 1971; Safilios-Rothschild, 1970).

APPENDIX

Additional Measurement Description

Poverty Index--A poverty threshold was calculated for each family, taking into account income needs of the number and ages of household members, proportion of past year members resided in the household, and a consummer price index for the particular region of the U.S., rural-urban nature of the study area and year of study. The poverty index was determined by dividing the family's income by the poverty threshold.

Poverty was categorized as follows:
(1) 74 and under; (2) 75-99; (3) 100-124; (4) 125-149; (5) 150-199; (6) 200 and over

Perception of Income Adequacy

Question: To what extent do you think your income is enough for you to live on?

Alternative Responses: a. Can afford about everything we want and still save money; b. Can afford about everything we want; c. Can afford some of the things we want but not all; d. Can meet necessities only; e. Not at all adequate.

Categorization for Analysis: Because of the small response rate, the first three categories were combined in statistical analysis.

Perception of Income Dependability

Question: Knowing when and how much income they will get is important to families, so we are interested in how dependable you feel your income has been. Looking back over all the places you got income from this past 12 months, describe how dependable your income was.

Responses: a. Income not dependable at all; b. Income received regularly but amount varies a lot; c. Income dependable part of the year but not all year; d. Dependable part received regularly plus an amount above that varies or differs from time to time; e. Steady income.

Categorization for Analysis: The middle three categories were combined.

Residence Background--If a person was born locally (i.e., within 50 miles of his present residence) he was considered a nonmigrant. If he lived over half of his life in rural areas, he was considered to have a rural background. If he lived over half of his life in urban areas, he was considered to have an urban background.

Marital Satisfaction--the respondents were asked four questions:

(1) How satisfied are you with your husband's understanding of your problems and feelings? (2) How satisfied are you with the attention you receive from your husband? (3) How satisfied are you with your husband's help around the home? (4) How satisfied are you with the time you and your husband spend just talking?
Alternative responses were: Very satisfied; Somewhat satisfied; Somewhat Dissat.; Very Dissatisfied. The responses were weighted 4 through 1, respectively, and summed. Item analysis revealed high interitem and item-to-total correlations.

REFERENCES

Blood, Robert O., Jr.
1963 "The measurement and bases of family power: a rejoinder." Marriage and Family Living 25 (November): 475-478.

Blood, Robert O., Jr. and Donald M. Wolfe
1960 Husbands and Wives, The Dynamics of Married Living. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe.

Centers, Richard, Bertram H. Raven and Aroldo Rodrigues
1971 "Conjugal power structure: a re-examination." American Sociological Review 36 (April): 264-278.

Cohen, Albert K. and Harold M. Hodges, Jr.
1963 "Characteristics of the lower-blue-collar-class." Social Problems 10 (Spring): 303-334.

Fortune, Hilda O.
1963 "A study of the power position of mothers in contemporary Negro family life in New York City." New York: New York University, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation.

Evans, Richard H. and Norman R. Smith
1969 "A selected paradigm of family behavior." Journal of Marriage and the Family 31 (August): 512-517.

Granbois, Donald H. and Ronald P. Willett
1970 "Equivalence of family role measures based on husband and wife data." Journal of Marriage and the Family 32 (February): 68-72.

Heer, David M.
1962 "Husband and wife perceptions of family power structure." Marriage and Family Living 24 (February): 65-67.

1963 "The measurement and bases of family power: an overview." Marriage and Family Living 25 (May): 133-139.

Herbst, P. G.
1952 "The measurement of family relationships." Human Relations 5:3-35.

Hill, Reuben and Roy H. Rodgers
1964 "The Developmental Approach." Pp. 171-211 in Harold T. Christensen (ed.), Handbook of Marriage and the Family. Chicago: Randy McNally.

Hoffman, Lois Wladis
1960 "Effects of the employment of mothers on parental power relations and the division of household tasks." Marriage and Family Living 22 (February): 27-35.

King, Karl
1969 "Adolescent perception of power structure in the Negro family." Journal of Marriage and the Family 31 (November): 751-755.

Kutner, Nancy G.
1971 "Who is the 'head of the family?' Some evidence from Lower-class Negro couples." Paper presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, Miami.

Levinger, George
1964 "Task and social behavior in marriage." Sociometry 27 (December): 433-448.

Lipset, Seymour M.
1960 Political Man. Garden City: Doubleday.

Moynihan, Daniel P.
1965 The Negro Family: The Case for National Action. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor.

Olson, David H.
1969 "The measurement of family power by self-report and behavioral methods." Journal of Marriage and the Family 31 (August): 545-550.

Olson, David H. and Carolyn Rabunsky
1972 "Validity of four measures of family power." Journal of Marriage and the Family 34 (May): 224-233.

Parker, Seymour and Robert J. Kleiner
1969 "Social and psychological dimensions of the family role performance of Negro males." Journal of Marriage and the Family 31 (August): 500-506.

Rainwater, Lee
1966 "Crucible of identity: the Negro lower-class family." Daedalus (Winter): 172-211.

Safilios-Rothschild, Constantina
1969 "Family sociology or wives' family sociology? A cross-cultural examination of decision-making." Journal of Marriage and the Family 31 (May): 290-301.

Scanzoni, John H.
1965 "A note on the sufficiency of wife responses in family research." Pacific Sociological Review 8 (Fall): 109-115.

1971 The Black Family in Modern Society. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Sharp, Harry and Paul Mott
1956 "Consumer decisions in the metropolitan family." Journal of Marketing (October): 149-156.

Turk, James K. and Norman W. Bell
1972 "Measuring power in families." Journal of Marriage and the Family 33 (May): 215-222.

Wilkening, Eugene A. and Lakshmi K. Bharadwaj
1968 "Aspirations and task involvement as related to decision-making among farm husbands and wives." Rural Sociology 33 (March): 30-45.

Wilkening, Eugene A. and Denton E. Morrison
1963 "A comparison of husband and wife responses concerning who makes farm and home decisions." Marriage and Family Living 25 (August): 349-351.

Wolfe, D. M.
1959 "Power and authority in the family." Pp. 99-117 in Dorwin Cartwright (ed.), Studies in Social Power. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute for social Research.